

BOARD EDUCATION AND EVALUATION

Orienting New Board Members

The chair of the board arranges for new trustee orientation in coordination with the library director. It is best if initial orientation can occur before the first board meeting, but it is likely to take a number of months to cover the range of information needed by a board member. At the first board meeting, it is helpful to take time for members to provide background about agenda items and answer questions for the new trustee.

A portion of each board meeting or special sessions may address topics that are important to all board members. One goal might be to review and discuss the content of this *Public Library Trustee Reference Manual*. Another goal may be to schedule regular staff presentations and discussions about library services and practices.

In order for a new board member to fully grasp the range of their responsibilities and gain knowledge about the library the orientation should:

- Acquaint new board members with the library past, present, and future.
- Review responsibilities of board as a governing or advisory board with obligations to meet public meeting laws.
- Clarify the separate and distinct roles of the board, director, staff, Friends of the Library, volunteers, foundations, other governmental units, etc.
- Review policies emphasizing the difference between the board policy-making role and the implementation role of director and staff.
- Visit all library facilities, meet key staff, and see demonstrations as appropriate.
- Answer specific questions and discuss philosophical issues.

Information Needed by New Board Members

New board members will need a variety of information from different sources in order to be fully prepared for their duties. The information provided should include:

From the Appointing Authority

Letter of appointment including term of office.

From the Board of Trustees

Letter of welcome from board chair.

Current roster of board members.

Position description for library trustees.

Board bylaws.

Board code of ethics.

Description of board committees and their responsibilities.

Meeting calendar and attendance expectations for board and committee sessions.

Board minutes for at least two previous years, more if needed to be familiar with development of projects, building or other capital expenditure programs, etc.

Explanation of costs that will be paid or reimbursed, such as attending the American Library Association or Washington Library Association annual conferences.

From the Library Director

Letter of welcome from library director.

Library mission statement.

History of library.

Long-range and annual work plans.

Organizational chart and list of staff, positions, and contact information.

Position description for library director.

Salary schedule and classification schedule for library positions.

Library policies handbook.

Annual operations plans and status reports for public services, technical services, technology, facilities, etc.

Current budget and at least one prior year's budget.

Local ordinances, charters or agreements impacting library.

Major library contracts.

Audit reports for at least two periods.

Information about library facilities including floor plans.

Community demographics, analysis of trends, and other background information.

Other Information Resources

Public Library Trustee Reference Manual and Public Library Trustee Summary Manual

Information about public library laws in Washington or access to the state of Washington *Revised Code of Washington* in print or via the Internet.

Membership brochures for the Washington Library Association, American Library Association and the Pacific Northwest Library Association.

Access to the Internet, and training in use of the Internet, in order to use online primary resources.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE BOARD MEMBER

(Permission received July 2001 to adapt and publish "35 Ideas on How to Govern Better" by E. A. Mosher, *Connecticut Town and City*, May-June 1990)

Learn all you can about your library, its history, its operations, its financing. Do your homework. Know your library policies. Dust off your comprehensive plan.

Devote sufficient time to your office and to studying the present and future problems of your library and the communities it serves.

Don't burn yourself out on the little things, but recognize that they are often important to the public. Save your energy and time for the important matters.

Don't let honest **differences of opinion** within the board degenerate into personality conflicts.

Remember that **you represent all the people of your library district**, and each of its communities, not just neighbors and friends. Be wary of personal experiences coloring your public decisions.

Don't act as a committee of one; governing a library requires a multiple team effort—practically and legally. Be a team player and leader.

Take your budget preparation job seriously, for it determines what your library does or does not do for the coming year and will also influence what happens in future years.

Establish policy statements. Written policy statements let the public, and let staff know where they stand. The policy statements not only help the board to govern, the process of writing them helps to develop consensus.

Make decisions on the basis of **public policy**, and be consistent. Treat similar situations similarly, and avoid favoritism.

Focus your attention on ways to **prevent problems**, rather than just trying to solve them as they occur. Filling potholes is one approach to governing; developing plans to prevent them is more effective.

Don't be misled by the strong demands of special interest groups that want something done now, their way. Your job is to find the long-term public interest of library customers as a whole, and you may be hearing from the wrong people.

Don't be afraid of change. Don't be content to just follow the routine of your predecessors. Charge your library director with being responsible for new ideas and better methods. Listen, ask questions and support good ideas.

Don't give quick answers when you are not sure of the real answer. It may be embarrassing to appear unknowledgeable, but it can be more embarrassing, and damaging, to give incorrect information. Just say "I'll get the answer and get back to you."

Don't rush to judgment. Few final actions have to be taken at the first meeting at which they are considered. Avoid "crisis management."

As an individual trustee, **don't make promises you can't deliver!** Decisions and actions require approval of the entire board.

Remember that you have **legal authority** as a governing board member only when the board is in legal session or you have been delegated authority to pursue a topic.

Don't spring surprises on fellow trustees or your library staff, especially at public meetings. If a matter is worth bringing up for discussion, it's worth being on the agenda. Surprises may get you some publicity, at the embarrassment of others, but they tend to erode any "team" approach to governance.

Participate in official meetings with the dignity and decorum fitting those who hold a position of **public trust**. Personal dress and courteous behavior at meetings help create an environment for making sound public decisions.

Conduct your official public meetings with some formality, and **follow rules of procedure**. Have an agenda and follow it. Most governing body members agree that formal meetings expedite the process and promote better decision-making.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is one of the ways we learn. But do your homework by studying the agenda material before meetings.

Vote yes or no on motions. Don't cop out by abstaining except when you have a legitimate conflict of interest. A pass does not relieve you of responsibility when some decision must be made.

Once a majority decision of the governing body has been made, **respect the official position** and defend it if needed, even if you personally disagreed.

Respect the letter and intent of the **open meetings law**, but also keep private and confidential matters to yourself—don't gossip.

Retain a competent library director, and pay the director and support staff well, trust their professional judgment, and recognize their authority and responsibilities.

Don't bypass the system. You have a library director responsible for day-to-day operations. Don't attempt to micromanage, nor interfere with operations.

Don't let others bypass the system. Insist that people such as equipment or service suppliers work with the library purchasing staff. If direct contact with governing body members is necessary, it should be with the board as a whole in an official meeting.

Don't pass the buck or responsibility for a hot issue to staff or employees when they are only following your policies or decisions.

Don't always take no for an answer. The right question may be "How can we do this?" instead of "Is it possible to do this?"

Encourage imaginative solutions. Learn to evaluate recommendations and alternative courses of action. Ask the library director to provide options.

Be concerned about the long-term future of the library. Avoid taking short-term gains at the expense of long-term losses.

When **determining the public interest**, balance personal rights and interests, considering the possible harm to a few versus the good of the many. Recognize in many situations, everyone can't be a winner.

Provide leadership in the intergovernmental system. Keep in contact with and cooperate with your federal, state, city and special district officials.

Learn to listen—really listen—to your fellow trustees, county and municipal officials and the public. Hear what they are trying to say, not just the words spoken.

Learn to be effective with the media. Cultivate good media relationships and communicate successes. Consider funding a public information officer's position.

Maintain your sense of humor. Don't take yourself or the business of libraries and government so seriously that you don't enjoy it. It should be fun as well as a rewarding experience.

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR BOARD MEMBERS

Contributed by: Patience Rogge, Trustee
Jefferson County Rural Library District

Gone are the days when all that was required to be a library trustee was a love of reading. The modern library is a high tech business and the trustee must have the savvy to deal with its demands.

To ensure that a library board functions effectively, it is crucial that the board maintain an on-going program of trustee education.

The process of trustee education should begin even before an individual is appointed to the board. Applicants should be supplied with orientation materials such as the library's mission statement, history, long-range plans, and copies of its policies and procedures.

Once appointed, a new trustee should be given an orientation by the director, the board chair, and, if the board has one, a trustee emeritus. The new board member should tour library facilities and be introduced to staff.

A regular education session should be set for each board meeting. These sessions can be devoted to topics such as:

Internal education:

- A demonstration of how materials are processed.
- An explanation of how an information services librarian tracks down answers to patrons' questions.
- A hands-on introduction to using the Internet.

External education:

- How the county prosecutor's office acts as legal counsel to the library.
- How the county treasurer handles library investments.
- What programs the local arts commission has that can mesh with the library's role as a community cultural center.

The responsibility for maintaining the trustee education program rests upon the board itself, either the chair or a designee. There are many resources available for trustee education:

- The director and staff, who can explain the often esoteric inner workings of the library.
- Professional literature, including the publications of library organizations such as the Washington Library Association, the Public Library Association, the Washington Library Friends and Trustees Association, the American Library Association and the Association of Library Trustees and Advocates, as well as publications aimed at boards of non-profit organizations.
- Attendance at conferences, especially the Workshop In Library Leadership (WILL) conference sponsored by the Washington State Library.
- Electronic sources, such as the Websites of the professional associations.
- The myriad local officials and experts in every field who can share knowledge the board needs to provide the best possible library service to its community.

Evaluating the Board and Board Members

Following are a number of self-evaluations that a board might adopt in order to assess how successfully it is operating as a board and in advancing library programs and services. Depending on the results the board may consider a retreat, some targeted continuing education, or employ a consultant to help address goals.

HOW WELL ARE WE DOING AS A BOARD?

**Contributed by: Mary Y. Moore, Statewide Library Training
Consultant, Washington State Library**

Please rate your board for each of the following essential functions, using these ratings:

- 1. I didn't know we had to do that.*
- 2. We do this so seldom I can't rate it.*
- 3. I think we can improve here, but we have a good start.*
- 4. I think we are darned good at this.*
- 5. We could teach other boards how to do this!*

Essential Board Functions:**Ratings**

Strategic Planning and Evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
Resource Oversight	1	2	3	4	5
Establishing and Reviewing Policy	1	2	3	4	5
Annually Evaluating the Director	1	2	3	4	5
Advocating for the Library	1	2	3	4	5
Representing Library to the Community	1	2	3	4	5
Ethical Behavior	1	2	3	4	5

Where should we concentrate in order to be more successful as a board and to increase library success?**Increasing Board Effectiveness**

- *Planning effective, efficient meetings*
- *Encouraging regular attendance by board members*
- *Avoiding trivial agendas and discussions*
- *Avoiding jumping to conclusions*
- *Avoiding short term bias*
- *Avoiding redoing/rehashing*
- *Planning ahead to avoid reactivity*
- *Making firm decisions*
- *Assuring ethical behaviors and decisions*
- *Avoiding micromanaging of the director or library operations*

Increasing Potential for Library Success

- *Accomplishing strategic planning*
- *Establishing/reviewing policies and plans*
- *Managing resources wisely*
- *Clarifying lines of authority and responsibility*
- *Being knowledgeable advocates for the library*
- *Building relationships with other libraries and organizations*

HOW WELL AM I DOING AS A TRUSTEE?

Evaluation is healthy for both the board and for its individual members. In the following evaluation there are no "correct" answers, but the questions represent attitudes and activities that if individually adopted, lend themselves to achieving success for the board and the library. The following is adapted from the *Idaho Library Trustee Manual*.

Do you understand and respect the different roles and duties of the library director and board of trustees, and avoid micromanaging?

Yes Usually No

Have you attended every regular, special, and executive board meeting and appropriate committee meetings since becoming a board member?

Missed 0 Missed 1 or 2 Missed 3 or more

Do you study board materials prior to the meeting in order to be prepared for discussion and decision-making?

Always Usually Seldom

Do you actively participate in board discussions?

Always Usually Seldom

Do you personally support and encourage the board to deal primarily with policy, planning, and evaluation?

Yes Usually Seldom

Do you encourage the board to include a continuing education item on every agenda?

Yes Usually Seldom

Have you contacted or met with your elected representatives about library issues at least once in the past 12 months?

Local government	State Government	U.S. Congress Representative
Yes No	Yes No	Yes No

How many library-related meetings or workshops have you attended in the last year that are sponsored by the WLA, ALA, other state or national associations or organizations?

6 or more 3 to 5 1 to 2 None

How many events sponsored by your library have you attended in the last year?

6 or more 3 to 5 1 to 2 None

How many community events have you attended as a representative of the library in the last year?

6 or more 3 to 5 1 to 2 None

Have you visited all of the library facilities since being appointed a trustee?

All of them Most of them A few None

In the last 60 days have you visited your library headquarters or at least one branch other than to attend a board meeting?

Yes No

Do you personally support and encourage the board to review and evaluate the library's mission statement, planning documents, and policy manual for currency and appropriateness?

Yes No

Do you personally support and encourage the board to annually review the library's strategic plan, long-range plan, goals, objectives, and service plan?

Yes No

Do you personally support and encourage the board to evaluate the library director annually and discuss board expectations?

Yes No

Do you personally support and encourage the board to annually evaluate it's own performance?

Yes No

Have you read the federal and Washington state laws relevant to libraries and reviewed how they affect your responsibilities?

Yes Some of them No

Do you review proposed laws of the Congress or the Washington State Legislature as well as evaluate the implications of state initiatives/referendums on your library?

Yes Some of them No

Are you a current, active member of the Washington Library Association, the Washington Library Friends and Trustee Association, the American Library Association, the Association for Library Trustees and Advocates or other library related associations?

WLA		WLFTA		ALA		ALTA		Other	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Have you created a relationship with other libraries in your area by visiting their facilities and meeting their trustees and/or administration?

Yes Some of them No

If your personal score reflects a low level of participation, should you consider resigning so a more active member can be appointed?

Yes No

RESOURCES

(See Chapter 26 for Websites, telephone numbers and addresses)

Washington Library Friends and Trustees Association (WLFTA)

Association for Library Trustees and Advocates (ALTA)

Washington State Library Consultants Team

Internet Websites

National Center for Non-Profit Boards <http://www.ncnb.org>

Compass Point: Board Cafe <http://compasspoint.org>